

Reconstruction Simulation:

Overall goals: to reconstruct the nation which has been torn apart by the Civil War. The groups that we will represent are:

A) Radical Republicans: The victorious northerners of the Republican Party who want to make radical reforms to punish the South and guarantee the rights of the newly freed slaves.

B) Defeated Southern Leaders: The war has been lost and the north has freed the slaves. They had to decide whether to heal old wounds or fight for what was lost.

C) Freedmen: Former slaves who now must find work and find their place in politics, the economy and society.

D) Moderate Republicans: Leaders like President Lincoln and Vice President Johnson who wish to take it easy on the South so that they will peacefully rejoin the Union without too much resentment.

How the game is played: Form groups of from 2-8 members. Read the overall goals for your group. Then begin reading the individual problems that your group must face. Discuss solutions to these problems openly. Record your responses on a separate sheet of paper. If members of your group disagree upon a particular solution record both responses and indicate that some will do one thing and some will do another. You are representing a whole class of society, so not everyone will respond to challenges in the same way.

Please keep in mind that you must be as specific as possible in your proposed solutions. For example, it is not enough just to say, "We will create schools to educate Freed Blacks". Which level of government will do this, local, state or Federal? Who will pay for it? Keep in mind the time period that you are dealing with. There are no income taxes, the Federal Government is relatively small and not used to dealing directly with social problems. There are no civil rights laws dealing with race or gender. Only white males with property can vote, for example. There are no government agencies that give financial aid to minorities of any kind.

Most importantly: try to think as people would have thought in the late 1860's. Don't try and insert your own modern ideas of what is right. Be faithful to the role you are playing even if you disagree with the views of the group you are representing.

Group roles: Each group will need at least one of the following.. Small groups may cover more than one role:

Facilitator: Leads the discussion and makes sure everyone has a chance to participate

Recorder: Writes down the final responses to the questions. Clearly label which question is being addressed and check for completeness, spelling and grammar errors.

Compromiser: Tries to come to an agreement with which everyone can live.



Group A: Radical Republicans

You have won the war and are proud of it. You intend to have the Republican Party take credit for saving the Union, and never let anybody forget it. You are not beyond waving a bloody shirt during political speeches to remind people what the Confederacy did to this country. You believe in severely punishing the South for breaking away from the Union and starting the war. You are glad that the question of whether the federal government should be more powerful than the states has been settled once and for all in favor of the federal government. You are anxious to use that new power to show the defeated southern states who is boss. You feel that if the South is treated too lightly they might rise up in rebellion again, and one civil war was enough. You are beginning to lose patience with the President for being too soft on the South and not moving quickly enough to help free blacks obtain their political and economic rights. Here are the problems you must discuss and solve together:

1. How will you treat the leaders of the old Confederate government? Some of them would like to run for office and rejoin your government.
2. How will you deal with the Confederate prisoners of war? How and when will you release them? Should they be punished for fighting against the United States? The usual punishment for treason is the death penalty. Does everyone get this, officers and enlisted men alike?
3. What do you do with the occupied areas of the South? What rules do you make for states that want to rejoin the Union? How do people get back their citizenship in the Union?
4. How will you guarantee the rights of free blacks? Many southerners are still very prejudiced against blacks and do not want to give them their rights. They want to bring back the old way of life before slavery was abolished. How do you educate the blacks and teach them job skills? Most of them only knew farming before they got their freedom, how can they farm if they don't own land? You would like to have blacks vote and participate in government like other men, but how can they vote and run for office if most can't read and don't have any political experience?

Group B: Defeated Southern Leaders

Despite your best efforts you have lost the war. Outnumbered by the North, and unable to get the support from England or France that you needed, your under supplied troops were forced to surrender to the North unconditionally. The Union government has occupied your land, freed the slaves, and dissolved the Confederate Government. The lifestyle that you were used to in slavery times will never be again; it is now "gone with the wind". How do you live in peace with the former slaves now that the North is forcing you to share power with them? How can you try to regain your wealth now that the war has destroyed your lands and property, and the freed slaves insist that you pay them for their work? How do you make peace with the North and rejoin the Union you fought so hard to break away from? Here are the problems that you must discuss and solve together:

1. What kind of political rights are you willing to give the free blacks? The victorious northerners are insisting that you give freedmen the vote and let them participate in government. How far do you want these freedoms to go? Will you allow the blacks to be your equals in every way?
2. What kinds of rights will you give blacks in society? Can they own property? Travel freely? Get an education? Have any jobs they want?
3. How will you rebuild the economy of the South? How will you make up for the loss of free labor now that you don't own slaves?
4. How do you convince the North that you won't cause any more trouble for them? What will you do about the people in the South who are saying, "Save your confederate money; the South will rise again!"? How do you rejoin the Union and give up all that you fought for? What will you do with the Northerners who want to come to the South and "help you rebuild"? Some of them want to buy up your land and businesses and run for office in your state.

Group C: Freedmen

You can hardly believe it! You rejoice because the long, hard days of slavery are over. It seems like you have died and gone to Heaven. You are still on Earth however, and now you must face the unknown life of freedom after slavery. How will you survive on your own with no one to help you? How can you make a better life for yourself? Here are the problems you must discuss and solve together:

1. Who will you be? Do you keep your master's old name or make a new one? Do you try and find your lost family members separated by war and slavery or strike out on your own?

2. What kind of work will you do? Most of you know only farming. If you want to remain farmers, where will you get land? Will you try to get an education or some job training to improve your living conditions? Will you stay where you are and try to find work with your former master or go to the North or West to find new opportunities?

3. How much do you want to get involved in politics? They tell you that you can vote now, but how? Who will teach you to read? Who will explain the political system to you? You aren't familiar with political power because you have never had it before. Do you dare to run for office and try to change society yourself?

4. You face a lot of resentment and discrimination from the former leaders of the South. How will you get along with them peacefully? How can you solve your differences with them when some say that they will never treat you as an equal and want to restore things to the way they were before the Civil War? How will you protect yourself if things get violent?

Group D: Moderate Republicans

You have saved the Union at all costs. That included defeating the Confederacy and freeing the slaves. How hard will you be with the defeated South? You feel strongly that if you push them too far they will only rebel again. What kind of society will you set up now? Do you try to let all groups have complete social and political freedom or is freedom from slavery enough? Some groups resent your use of the president's power to make these sweeping changes. They miss the times before the war when Congress made most of the decisions. Others think that you are not acting quickly or strongly enough to deal with the problems at the end of the war. They want to punish the South and give complete freedom to blacks immediately. How will you keep a balance that will keep everyone happy and keep your party in power? Here are the problems you must discuss and solve:

1. How can you let the rebellious southern states rejoin the Union and be sure that they will stay loyal to the United States? How will you deal with the defeated Confederate Army leaders? Many are calling for their deaths as traitors. What will you do with your prisoners of war? How long will you keep troops in the defeated southern states? Your supporters want them removed as soon as possible to get things back to normal as quickly as you can.
2. How will you deal with the collapsed economy of the south? Will you rebuild it with northern money or let them fend for themselves? What do you do with the numerous unemployed former slaves? How will you treat the free blacks that want to move to the North and the West?
3. Do you have the right to tell the southern states how treat the free blacks? Will you change their laws and constitutions if necessary? Some of your fellow northerners have offered to go to the south and buy their farms and businesses and run their political offices if the southerners can't be trusted. Will you allow or encourage this?
4. How do you help protect the freed blacks from discrimination and racial violence? How do you educate blacks and find them jobs? How can you provide land for blacks who want to continue farming? How do you force Southerners to treat blacks as equals?